

GROOMING HUMANS

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ABSTRACT

This case study examines the journey of entrepreneurial leadership of Fr. Romualdo D' Souza in the field of education in general and management education in particular. It explores various leadership issues such as risk-taking, negotiation, conceiving ideas and group empowerment in an educational enterprise. Learning outcome from this case reflects the theories on role of leaders in modern day enterprises.

KEYWORDS: Leadership, Risk-Taking, Empowerment

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INTRODUCTION

It was in the early nineteen nineties. Fr. Romualdo D' Souza s.j.¹ had just moved to Goa² after his successful stint as founder Director³ at XIM⁴ Bhubaneswar⁵. It could be termed successful because during this stint he was able to convince the Government of Orissa (now Odisha)⁶ for a grant of 20 acres⁷ of land to set up the XIM. The wild land that was given as a grant was not readily suitable for the construction of the buildings. The soil was infested with pests which had rendered it (the land) hollow in patches. It was a huge challenge to undertake civil works in that area. After a prolonged chemical treatment of the land, the civil works were commenced and completed on schedule. As Fr. D'Souza puts it:

"I had to use all my persuasive powers to convince the Hon'ble Chief Minister of the State of Odisha that the institute that was envisaged required a minimum area of 20 acres. Fortunately I could convince the Hon'ble Chief Minister who understood my point of view and obliged by making a grant of the land. But my problems did not stop there. The land was wild. After clearing it of shrubs we encountered another problem. The soil was infested with termites. The termites had eaten into the land so much that large hollows were encountered at regular intervals. The engineers expressed the fear that the buildings would not be stable unless the land was freed from the termite menace. Experts suggested a systematic and prolonged chemical treatment of the soil after which we could execute the civil works and complete the project."

¹ Member of the Society of Jesus ; a missionary society of the Jesuits

² One of the states of the Indian Republic

³ Founded XIM in October 1987

⁴ Xavier Institute of Management managed by the Jesuits

⁵ Capital of Odisha

⁶ One of the states in the Indian Republic

⁷ One acre is 4046.85 square metres

BUILDING ACADEMIC MUSCLE

On the academic front, apart from having an experienced faculty and robust syllabi incorporating the needs of the industry, Fr. D'Souza initiated linkages with the University of Antwerp in Belgium and with the Ohio University in the United States of America. The linkage programme required that the students from these two universities visit XIM and complete a project spanning two weeks. These projects were essentially taken up in the factories in Odisha or other nearby places in the country. The visiting students interacted with the faculty and the local students. They gained first-hand experience at the shop floor level. They shared their experiences and learning with the managements of the firms where they worked.

THE DEPARTURE FROM XIM B

Having successfully set up the XIM (now Xavier University) at Bhubaneswar and having been at the helm of affairs of the institute imparting quality education, Fr D'Souza had a different perspective when XIM began to take the rural path. While the think tank at the institute felt very strongly that XIM should move to cater to the rural areas Fr D'Souza's was the lone voice against this move. He felt the objective of justice to the poor would be better served if the rural youth were trained at XIM itself instead of the other way around. Unable to convince the others, Fr D'Souza moved to Goa with the some of the commitments of that academic year remaining to be fulfilled...

"I did speak out my mind when the move to take the rural path was mooted. If education had to serve as the means to uplift the poor, we had to train these youngsters in a world class institute like XIM. I left XIM and moved to Goa. However, the batches from the foreign universities were due to visit the country for their projects. I was committed to that. I had no other choice than to bring them to Goa and put them up with some of the reputed companies here"

THE IDEA OF GIM⁸ TAKES SHAPE

The projects undertaken by the students culminated in presentations to the company honchos. They were so impressed with the presentations that many of them confided that they learnt a lot from the two week work put in by the students and gained better insights into their own organizations. There was a unanimous view. Why not have an institute in Goa to train young professionals in business? And who would be better placed to shoulder the responsibility than Fr D'Souza?

DOGGED DETERMINATION

The idea seemed bright but working the idea and implementing it was a tough job. Where were the premises? Where was the faculty? From where would the students come? Where was the infrastructure? These were questions that Fr D'Souza needed to answer and answer fast. Fr. D'Souza reminisces:

"When the idea was mooted it appeared great. Implementing it was an uphill task. I had to start from the scratch. No premises. No buildings. No faculty. No students. Was I crazy? To some extent I was. The horizon of success beckoned me. I decided to take the risk. Armed with a vision and the confidence I started figuring out the way. My friend Mr Shivanand Salgaonkar from the Salgaonkar Group of Companies and the trustee of the Salgaonkar

⁸ Goa Institute of Management

College of Law located in Panaji⁹ offered to spare two lecture halls from 9.00am to 5.00 pm in the college premises. My Maruti 800¹⁰ doubled up as my office. I rented houses for students' accommodation.

The first batch of students in 1993, consisted of candidates who did not make it to the final list of MMS¹¹ course offered by the Goa University¹². I remember approaching Dr.Sreekumar the then Head of the Department of Management Studies Goa University. He was apprehensive when I told him that I was going to start a PGDM programme in Goa. I allayed his fears and said that the only help I needed was the list of students who did not make it to the final list of the MMS course offered by the Goa University. He obliged and I had 24 students in my first batch. These students had fire in their belly to succeed and till this day I am proud of this first batch. Many of them have risen to the top in their respective workplaces.

My faculty whom we accommodated in rented apartments were my colleagues at XIM who followed me when I left XIM. The couple Uday and Suma Damodaran handled Finance and Economics respectively . V Gopal came with expertise in Finance and Anwar Ali looked after the areas of Operations and IT. Another couple C.M Ramesh and Rajini Swamy pitted in with their expertise in HR. Besides these faculty, I had my Man Friday Mr. Steven Fernandes with me. Steve as I called him followed me to all the places I moved. He assisted me as my Secretary from Jamshedpur to Bhubaneswar and finally to Goa. He gelled well into my style of working and this equation increased my work efficiency. I could delegate tasks without much hesitation especially to my faculty all of whom were alumni of IIM A¹³, IIM B¹⁴ and IIM K¹⁵.

The financial wherewithal came from corporate houses like the Salgaonkars, the Dempos and Sesa Goa Private Ltd. They contributed in instalments the money that they had committed which helped me to fund the expenses for the library and the faculty. All in all I could manage to set up GIM in 3 months time."

THE TAKE OFF

Sooner than later the management school had to be moved to a campus of its own. The then Chief Minister of Goa Mr. Pratapsingh Raoji Rane arranged and facilitated the move to the new campus at Ribandar¹⁶ in July 1994. The building was a hospital during the Portuguese¹⁷ regime and continued to be so even after liberation. During Operation Vijay¹⁸ the hospital was used to treat the wounded soldiers from both sides of the camp. When GIM moved in, it had to share the premises with the Dental College. GIM was allotted the old Pharmacy College building and a room of the Dental College. The Dental College was shifted to new premises from June 1995.

⁹ Capital of Goa

¹⁰ An economy class, entry level four wheeler manufactured by Maruti Udyog Pvt.Ltd. Its production has been discontinued now.

¹¹ Master in Management Studies

¹² A State University located in Goa

¹³ Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad

¹⁴ Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore now Bengaluru

¹⁵ Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta now Kolkata

¹⁶ A village on the outskirts of Panaji

¹⁷ Goa was ruled by Portugal for more than 450 years till it was liberated on 19th December 1961

¹⁸ The operation undertaken by India to liberate Goa from the Portuguese

The building overlooks the banks of the river Mandovi along the Panaji Ponda¹⁹ highway and offers a picturesque view from all sides. It is about 2 km from Panaji and offered a proposition of a 'village within a city'.

The institute applied for affiliation from the AICTE and got its first approval for a period of five years commencing from 1995-96.

The response from students from all over the country was overwhelming. The number of applicants for the PGDM course rose significantly every year and the institute was now in a position to be financially independent. The Executive Program brought in additional finances.

"After we moved to the new campus in July 1994, I could consolidate and pay attention to the other requirements. We used to charge Rs 3400/- per term²⁰ initially which we gradually increased. Our fees began to pay for our expenses and we were on the path of standing on our own feet financially.

We got an overwhelming response for admission with around 13000 applicants applying for a seat. We considered the XAT²¹ score for admissions and we had no reservations. I believe that an institution has to look for a larger pool to get learners from. Therefore the selection process has to extend to the whole nation if the institute has to be of the stature of a national institute.

The history of the Executive Programme that we offered at the GIM is interesting. I had started a similar programme at XLRI²² at the request of the TATAS for their executives. I was also very active in the AICTE and suggested for a reduction of the required hours for an Executive Programme on the rationale that students opting for this programme were working people and a lot of assimilation of knowledge happened at the work place. The AICTE reduced the hours from 1000 to 900 and eventually to 800 hours.

The idea of starting an executive programme at GIM took shape when the government of Goa came up with a proposal for training its officers who were direct recruits in the Goa Civil Service. We started the first Executive programme in 1998. After a break of one year to sort out the teething problems, we re-started the programme in June 2000. We also signed a MOU²³ with the Government of Goa to take 10 Officers every year to pursue their education through the Executive Programme. For this purpose officers desirous of enrolling for the programme had to go through the selection process and the top ten made it to the final list. Our Executive programme became richer in terms of learning and experience with these senior Govt. Officers on board. Needless to mention, our finances also improved."

A SKILLFUL NEGOTIATOR

In different capacities and in his journey as an educational entrepreneur Fr. D'Souza has displayed extraordinary negotiating skills. The position he occupied entailed liaising with different individuals and with different agencies. Prior to setting up the XIM B, Fr. D'Souza spent a little over three years at XLRI Jamshedpur as the Director. He had inherited a debt ridden institution. His skills as an astute negotiator amply came to the fore during his stint at Jamshedpur. While

¹⁹ A city in Goa

²⁰ The two year course was a trimester course consisting of three terms in a year

²¹ Xavier Admission Test conducted by XLRI

²² Xavier Labour Relations Institute founded in 1949 by the Jesuits is located at Jamshedpur at Jharkhand and is one of the oldest and top ranked School of Management

²³ Memorandum of Understanding

talking about debts and how he manoeuvred through the debt maze, Fr D'Souza can't help laughing:

"When I joined XLRI the financial situation was extremely bad. To compound the situation the institute was running considerable and mounting debts. When I looked at the figures I found to my utter shock that a loan amount of Rs 2.44 lakh had reached an astronomical figure of Rs 29 lakh. The culprit was the penal interest. I approached the then Chairman of PNB²⁴ in Delhi and told him that under the Moneylender's Act they cannot charge more than 100% of what we had borrowed from them. The Chairman squirmed in his chair. Here was I telling them point blank that the amount recoverable from the institute cannot be more than 4.88 lakh. He outrightly refused to buy my argument. "How can you say that, Fr D'Souza? Are we money lenders?" he asked. "For me your bank is a money lender which has lent me a sum of money and which I have to pay back as per rule", I replied. I requested the Chairman to think over the issue. After a couple of days I received a call from the PNB office. The caller said that a PNB officer wanted to speak to me. The General Manager of PNB immediately came on the line and continued with the same line of argument that was given by the Chairman. I stuck to my argument. "But Fr D'Souza" the G.M said "As per our books, the debt has risen to 29 lakh including penal interest." "Mr .General Manager Sir" I replied. "These are figures which you and your staff have written in your books. My figure of 4.88 lakh is final". A long silence followed at the other end. Then the General Manager spoke "Anyways our branch manager at Jamshedpur will sort out the issue with you Fr D'Souza. Have a nice day".

The next day I met the branch manager at Jamshedpur who told me that I needed to open a current account with the bank with a deposit of Rs 5000/- since the earlier account had become dormant. I promised to do that immediately. And I did. Then we started some hard negotiations about the settlement of the loan. "Fr.D'Souza, the bank has decided to bring down the amount payable from Rs 29 lakh to Rs 8 lakh . Please clear the loan immediately. "You will appreciate to what extent we have cut down your liabilities" the Manager said. "Mr Manager sir, I do appreciate your gesture. You have lowered the outstanding loan amount. Why not lower it a little more to 4.88 lakhs and complete this negotiation?" I asked. The manager was looking at me intently and thinking hard. Finally he suggested a figure of Rs 5 lakh to which I agreed. Our entire liabilities were wiped out with a final settlement of Rs. 5 lakh".

THOROUGH UNDERSTANDING OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Fr D'Souza had the backing of rich experience of education at all levels. After completing his B.A, in Psychology, he went for his further studies to Belgium and the U.S. At the Colombia University he got advanced training in Stress Management - an area that has remained his passion and which he continues to teach even today. He headed the St. Joseph Technical Institute run by the Jesuits in Pune²⁵ and was a regular guest faculty at the University of Pune. As the Head of St. Vincent School Pune, he showed his flair to think differently by starting evening classes to enable the street children to complete their schooling. The regular students in the school achieved outstanding results under the guidance and leadership of Fr D'Souza. A commerce college was established through his initiative.

The congregation of the Society of Jesus also assigned other responsibilities to Fr D'Souza. He was elected as Provincial²⁶ of the Goa Poona Province extending from Beed District in Maharashtra²⁷ to Harihar in Karnataka²⁸. In his

²⁴ Punjab National Bank

²⁵ A city in the State of Maharashtra and an educational hub

²⁶ A Provincial is the head of a Province carved out for administrative purpose

own modest approach Fr D'Souza says:

"I was in a way thrown into the system and had to learn the ropes .Things happened once they were planned"

When asked about Fr D'Souza one of the faculties at GIM who has worked with him for many years has this to say:

Fr Romualdo has a clear grasp of the education system right from root to the roof. He studied the entire education system and this helped him to make critical decisions with far reaching consequences in double quick time.

He is a great leader, a go-getter and very concrete in his thoughts. One of the main reasons for me to quit a cosy Government job and join GIM in 1997 was the prospect of working with Fr.Romualdo. I have gained a lot through my close interactions with him.

He not only motivated and empowered his faculty but wielded a much greater influence on his students. He is an experienced hand at teaching Stress Management and many of his students occupy important position in the corporate world."

Steven Fernandes (Steve to Fr D'Souza) his secretary from 1983 till Fr D'Souza's retirement from GIM in 2003 rates his boss as an excellent administrator. In his words:

" Fr.Romualdo had an excellent hold over the administration matters and blended his administration duties with effective teaching. A hard task master, Fr D'Souza also showed compassion when the situation so demanded."

A PRIEST ON THE MOVE

Fr D'Souza defies age. Upon his 'retirement' from GIM, he went on to establish the Marian Institute of Health Care offering a two year full time course and preparing trained manpower in the sunshine sector of health care management. If not for the constraint of infrastructure²⁹, this course which saw four batches passing out successfully would have gained momentum. It is no surprise that the present additional course in Health Care Management offered at GIM, is an adapted version of Fr D'Souza's idea. Some to the faculty members at GIM are alumni of the Marian Institute of Health Care. Many observers feel that GIM literally took over the course that was the brainchild of Fr. D'Souza . When asked about this issue Fr D'Souza quips,

"I tried my best and ran from pillar to post to find a suitable place to locate this course but was unable to do so. I am happy that the course is continued elsewhere and some of my alumni are teaching there."

LEADERS NEVER GIVE UP CHURNING IDEAS

Undaunted by the experience of the experiment of Marian Institute of Health Care, Fr. D'Souza is the brain behind the Wellness and Counselling Course that is offered at Nirmala College of Education³⁰ and is affiliated to the Goa University. At the University he commands respect and awe on the sheer weight of his experience in the educational field. Using sound logic and in the interest of the students, Fr D'Souza convinced the Goa University to adopt the Trimester system and a different pattern of evaluation for the Wellness and Counselling course. Necessary ordinances were

²⁷ One of the states in the Indian Republic

²⁸ One of the states in the Indian Republic

²⁹ The premises had to be shifted twice during the five years

³⁰ One of the colleges in Goa offering a degree in Bachelor of Education

promulgated in this regard.

A PHILOSOPHER, A GUIDE AND AN AGILE MIND

An interaction with Fr.D'Souza leaves you wanting more of such interactions. His philosophy of education and his deep insights into the dynamics of education leaves the listener spellbound. Age has not diminished his enthusiasm. At 90 years he not only walks ramrod straight but displays very sharp and agile thinking. Question him on his mantra of success and he quotes the words of his favourite thinker: "When an idea takes to itself a body, the result is a revolution." When asked about the role of educational entrepreneurs in the emerging educational scenario he has this to say:

"Sincerity and commitment to the cause of education is a must. We need to listen to others, be aware of our surroundings and interpret minds. The challenges may change necessitating a change in the mindset but the core values remain the same. An institution should find a position in the overall scheme of the nation. We need to train human leaders by catering to the needs of building a human person. An evolving culture involving evolving relationships mandates that education evolves an answer through its own ingenuity.

Let us concentrate on strengthening the strengths of a human person without bothering unduly to get rid of the weaknesses."

CONCLUSIONS

How time does fly! I can't believe that my interaction with Fr. D'Souza lasted for more than three hours. Every minute of that interaction was a learning experience. As I wind up I wonder: What next? An encore? Who knows? You never know what Fr. D'Souza has up his sleeves. No stress on his face. He epitomizes cheerfulness and humour. No wonder he is so passionate about his subject of Stress Management. As I get up to leave, he walks along. We say goodbye. He opens the door. I am touched by the courteous gesture...

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